

Montana Department of  
Public Health & Human Services

Section:

**Best Beginnings Quality Child Care Initiatives**

**CHILD CARE**

Subject:

**Higher Education Merit Pay**

**Supersedes:** **Child Care Policy Manual Section 7.5 (5/01/05)**

**References:** **USCS (658G, 658E (C) (3) (B)) ARM 37.80.602**

**General  
Information**

The Montana Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), Higher Education Merit Pay program was developed with the goal of improving the quality of services provided to young children, by supporting early childhood professionals who are enrolled in an early childhood/child development college based program.

All applications are reviewed independently; therefore, each qualifying staff person in a licensed or registered child care facility may be eligible to receive an award.

**Higher  
Education Merit  
Pay  
Eligibility**

Early childhood professionals must be working a minimum of 15 hours a week in:

- ☐ A registered group or family child care home,
- ☐ A licensed child care center,
- ☐ A Montana Head Start, Early Head Start or Tribal Head Start, or
- ☐ A Montana Child Care Resource & Referral Agency.

Applicants must also be current members of the Montana Early Care & Education Practitioner's Registry.

Qualifying individuals who are in the process of applying for child care licensure or registration may apply for Higher Ed. Merit Pay; however, award funds will not be released unless the licensure/registration process is completed. (The establishment of a PV number in CCUBS provides the necessary verification.)

Higher Education Merit Pay will be awarded to approved applicants participating in at least six college credits per semester. Individuals may receive this award in each of two semesters per year for an award of \$750.00 per semester and a maximum award of \$1,500.00.

To receive a Higher Education Merit Pay award, applicants must be participating in a college program that leads to a credential or degree in Early Childhood/Child Development. They may also be participating in a college program that emphasizes Early Childhood and leads to a Level IV or higher on

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the Montana Early Care & Education Practitioner's Registry.

**Higher Ed. Merit  
Pay Application  
Process**

Higher Ed. Merit Pay applications will be available for one semester during the months of April, due back in June, and available again for another semester during the month October, due back again in November. Higher Ed Merit Pay applications are available at all Child Care Resource and Referral agencies and at the ECSB.

Higher Ed. Merit Pay applications are due in the ECSB no later than 5:00 PM on the stated date in June and the stated due date in October. Applicants will be notified within one month of the application due date of each award period regarding the approval or denial of their application.

Individuals may only apply for one Merit Pay program; multiple applications will be automatically denied.

Application forms must be complete and include all required information and signatures in order to be considered. A complete application must include the following:

1. Proof of employment at a qualifying facility including a child care facility's PV number and the owner/director's signature attesting to the fact the applicant is employed at the facility;
2. An applicant signature;
3. A letter of intent;
4. A listing of all training on a Higher Ed. Merit Pay Plan of Study (form CC-104c); and
5. The amount of financial aide and/or funding the applicant is eligible for and expects to receive. Examples include:
  - a. Full or partial Federal Pell Grants,
  - b. Family Care Network support,
  - c. Child Care Resource and Referral support,
  - d. Indian Fee Waiver,
  - e. Head Start or Early Head Start support,
  - f. State of Montana Best Beginnings grants,
  - g. Other scholarships or financial assistance.
6. A completed form W-9.

**The Higher Ed. Merit Pay application and Plan of Study are submitted to DPHHS/ECSB for approval. Applicants are selected for participation in the Higher Ed. Merit Pay program, based upon the content and quality of their**

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**application, their priority ranking and availability of funds.**

- ☐ If a participant does not complete the approved Plan of Study required for the Higher Education Merit Pay, she/he will not receive the Higher Ed. Merit Pay award. For example, if the applicant is approved for six semester credits and they do not complete the six semester credits, they will not qualify for any Higher Ed. Merit Pay funds.
- ☐ All coursework should address one or more components of the Early Childhood Knowledge Base. The Early Childhood Knowledge Base describes the early childhood competencies an early childhood professional must possess in order to offer high quality early care and education.
- ☐ All coursework for undergraduate practitioners must be completed at a regionally accredited higher education institute that is located in Montana and recognized by the Montana Board of Regents.
- ☐ Coursework for graduate practitioners may be completed at a higher education institution that is not located in Montana. However, such an institution must be accredited and recognized by the Montana Board of Regents.
- ☐ Upon completion of an approved *first semester Plan of Study*, the applicant must submit a transcript of their completed courses in order to receive their first semester award. (An unofficial copy of the transcript is acceptable.)
- ☐ If an applicant has been approved for two semesters of Higher Ed. Merit Pay, they will also submit a Plan of Study for the second semester. At the end of the second semester, they will submit transcripts for the courses completed to receive their second semester award.

**Priority for  
Higher  
Education Merit  
Pay**

Priority for Higher Ed Merit Pay is first ranked according to how much financial assistance the individual has assess to then given in the following order:

**NOTE: Applicants will not be eligible for Higher Ed. Merit Pay if receiving full funding from Pell Grants, Head Start, or other sources**

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1. Providers who have previously received the award and have not completed a credential in early childhood education or a related field and, are continuing in college coursework that leads to completion of a CDA credential, a CCDS Apprenticeship Certificate, a degree in Early Childhood/Child Development, or are participating in a higher education program that emphasizes Early Childhood and will lead to a Level IV or higher on the Montana Early Care & Education Practitioner's Registry.
2. Providers who have not previously received the award and are participating in college coursework that leads to completion of a CDA credential, a CCDS Apprenticeship Certificate, a degree in Early Childhood/Child Development, or participating in a higher education program that emphasizes Early Childhood and will lead to a Level IV or higher on the Montana Early Care & Education Practitioner's Registry.

When all factors for priority two are equal, then Child Care Development Specialist Apprentices who are registered with the Montana Department of Labor Apprenticeship & Training program will receive first consideration.

3. Providers *who* have not previously received the award and have not completed a credential in early childhood education or a related field and, who are participating in college coursework that will enhance a direct care provider's ability to work with young children, such as: child development, child guidance, health and safety, and developmentally appropriate practices.
4. Providers who have previously received the award and have not completed a credential in early childhood education or a related field *and*, who are participating in college coursework that will directly enhance a care providers ability to work with young children such as: child development, child guidance, health and safety, and developmentally appropriate practices.
5. Providers who have previously received the award and have completed a credential in early childhood education or a related field, who are participating in college coursework that will directly enhance a care providers ability to work with young children such as: child development, child guidance, health and safety, and developmentally appropriate practices.

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**Higher  
Education Merit  
Pay Summary  
And Proof Of  
Training  
Completion.**

Participants may request payment of their Higher Ed. Merit Pay award when they complete a semester of approved coursework. (a minimum of 6 credits)

Higher Education Merit Pay participants are required to be current members of the Montana Early Care & Education Practitioner's Registry. If a participant did not submit a copy of their Montana Practitioner's Registry Certificate at the time of application, they must provide that information when they request their award.

Additionally, participants that were in the process of becoming licensed or registered when they applied for Higher Ed. Merit Pay, but had not yet completed that process, will need to show proof that a license or registration certificate has been granted before Higher Ed. Merit Pay funds will be released.

In order to receive any Higher Ed. Merit Pay Award, participants are required to submit a signed summary form that includes an attestation stating that they are working in a facility approved for Higher Ed. Merit Pay participation. This form must also be signed by the appropriate owner/director; and include the following attachments:

- ☐ An official or unofficial college transcript from the semester that was just completed (This document provides proof of completion of the courses listed on the Plan of Study);
- ☐ A current copy of their Montana Early Care & Education Practitioner's Registry certificate (If a current copy is not already on file); and
- ☐ A current copy of their Montana child care license or registration certificate. (If Higher Ed Merit Pay was granted pending completion of a child care license or registration certificate).

Approved Higher Ed Merit Pay college coursework must be completed within the program year, August 1 to August 31 of the following year. For example, August 1, 2006 through August 31, 2007. Extensions will not be granted.

**CCUBS Process**

Upon receipt of an application the ECSB Contract Specialist will verify the applicant is entered as a 'Person' in the CCUBS system; and review the 'Person' screen to ensure the address matches the address on the Higher Ed. Merit Pay application and on the attached W-9. If the applicant is not input as a 'Person' in CCUBS, the ECSB will enter this information based on the Higher Ed. Merit Pay application and W-9.

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**NOTE: Use the TAB key on the computer keyboard when navigating in CCUBS from box to box on the ‘Contract Application’ screen.**

1. Applications are logged in on the CCUBS system when they are received in the ECSB office. This is done by entering information on the ‘Contract Application’ screen.

<b>CCUBS Field</b>	<b>Appropriate Entry</b>
Applicant ID:	The applicant’s PS number
Fed Fiscal Year	The appropriate federal fiscal year
Application Date	The date that information is being entered into CCUBS
Application Received	The date the application was date stamped
Contract Type	Higher Ed. Merit Pay (MRHE)
Application Status	Use the drop-down menu and select <i>Received</i> ;
Effective Date	08-01- [year of application];
Denial Reason	Not used to enter in application requests
End Date	08-31-[year when training must be completed];
Proposal Score	Not used when entering application requests
Application Checklist	Mark the <i>Training/Project Plan</i> .

2. Applications are prioritized and evaluated for participation in the program.
3. After the applications have been evaluated, the ECSB Program Specialist will update the ‘Contract Application’ screen in CCUBS. The ‘Application Status’ will be changed to either *Approved* or *Denied* and saved. If the status is *denied*, the Program Specialist will also be required to enter a denial reason on the screen.
4. CCUBS will generate, and automatically send a denial letter to unsuccessful applicants.

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5. Upon approval of the application, the ECSB Contract Specialist will set up the contract for all approved applicants following the steps below:

- a. On the 'Contract Application' screen in CCUBS, double click the box in the upper right hand corner labeled *Contract No.* This action will take the worker to the 'Contract' screen.
- b. On the 'Contractor' tab, enter the PS number of the applicant in the white box under Person ID\* and hit the TAB key.
- c. On the 'Budget' tab, put the cursor in the 'Budget Section' box. Select the Higher Ed Merit Pay [FFY] from the Budget Section drop down menu. **Using the mouse** move the cursor into the 'Budget Item' box and enter the following three budget items (Budget Items may be typed in word-specifically or may be selected from a list using the F9 key):
  - ☐ *Training-Semester 1*, hit the TAB key and type \$750
  - ☐ *Training –Semester 2*, hit the TAB key and type \$750.
  - ☐ *Advances* hit the TAB key and type in 0.
  - ☐ Click on the SAVE icon.

At this point, CCUBS will SAVE the screen with a Contract Number

**NOTE: An individual may be approved for one semester for a total award of \$750 or two semesters for a total award of \$1500. The budget entry should accurately reflect the award the participant was granted.**

- d. On the 'Contract Details' tab select the Contract Status drop down menu: highlight 2. *Negotiation Complete*, and SAVE; highlight 3. *Final In-Route Signatures*, and SAVE; highlight 4. *Mailed*, and SAVE; lastly highlight 5. *Executed*, and SAVE.
6. Letters of approval must be printed in the ECSB central office so that a *Higher Ed. Merit Pay Summary* form can be attached and sent to the applicant. In CCUBS, navigate to 'Notifications' and enter the contract number in the appropriate column, hit Execute [F8]. Click on 'View Notification' and print the approval letter from this PDF document.

